

‘Mummy, how did this happen?’



Charlotte stayed by Tay's bedside as she recovered

Charlotte Woodman, 36, experienced horror when her daughter caught alight at a family party...

As the smell of sizzling sausages and burgers wafted through the air during an evening in May this year, I took a sip of my wine as my kids, Enzo, 12, and Tay, four, played with each other in the garden. We'd all gathered together for a family barbecue at my partner Alan's sister's house. It was a send-off for her son who was about to leave to go travelling around Thailand, and everyone was having a great time.

I screamed and wailed in agony as I tried to soothe her. 'You're going to be OK,' I said as I tried not to cry myself. Minutes later, six paramedics arrived, and one of them asked us to soak kitchen towels in water and wrap them around her chest and stomach with clingfilm. He asked us what happened, but I wasn't sure.

The paramedics then quickly bundled her into the back of an ambulance with Alan and rushed

her to Northampton General Hospital.

I followed behind in the car and when we arrived at A&E, Tay was immediately met by the trauma team. By this point, the burns on her neck had begun to blister, and the doctors said they needed to take the tops off the blisters to help them heal.

While they scraped at her skin, my poor girl's face was etched in pain. I reassured her and told her how brave she was being, but I

was desperately trying to keep myself calm. Medics took photos of her injuries and sent them to a nearby burns unit before wrapping them in bandages. Tay and Alan were then transferred to the specialist burns unit at Birmingham Children's Hospital while I drove and met them there.

When Tay arrived, medics cleaned her wounds and gave her pain relief. The next morning, they reassessed her burns and we were delivered devastating news.

'Tay has suffered full thickness deep burns to her neck, chin, ears, left leg and chest. She's also experienced significant nerve damage, and we need to take her for skin graft surgery,' a doctor explained.

To prevent infection, surgeons scrubbed and cleaned her wounds before they shaved her hair. During a three-hour operation, they removed skin from her scalp and used it for a skin graft on her neck and chest.

When the surgery was completed, she was wheeled through to us in recovery. She was drowsy, and a feeding tube was put up her nose to help



Tay spent nearly three weeks in hospital and underwent multiple surgeries



Tay with Charlotte and Alan

She soon got out of bed, and later that week surgeons assessed her grafts. 'They seem to be taking well,' one explained. After two and a half weeks, Tay was discharged from hospital. We were so relieved to be home together as a family.

However, Tay's recovery journey was far from over. We had to return to the hospital every three days so doctors could give her an antiseptic bath and change her dressings. Unfortunately, the burns on her chin weren't healing well, and her other scars were lumpy and hard. Doctors told us she may need more treatment in the future. Alan and I had to moisturise her burns every day and change her bandages. Tay became tearful when she saw her red, raw chin. 'You're still healing, love,' I reassuringly told her.

It's been six months since the incident. Tay will eventually need occupational therapy to help the mobility in her neck, and she might also need compression garments to reduce scarring. We still don't know exactly how that night happened, but we're thankful Tay is still here and on the mend. It could've been so much worse.

Now, we're campaigning to raise awareness of the dangers of barbecues and garden heaters. With Halloween and bonfire night parties happening this month, we want more people to be educated on immediate first aid response, and how to act when someone is burned. What Tay has been through completely devastated us as a family, and we'd hate for anyone else to experience the same. We count our lucky stars every day that Tay is still alive.

'You're going to be OK'

'She deserved to know'

her get enough nutrients. But that night, she vomited and some of it seeped into her bandages, so she needed surgery the next morning to get it cleaned up. Alan and I were devastated and hated seeing our little girl so unwell.

In the following days, me and Alan kept a vigil by her bedside while my mum looked after Enzo. We watched on as doctors carefully monitored her, changing her dressings and issuing pain relief. She was so quiet as I asked if she wanted to try getting out of

bed, but she shook her head. She couldn't remember anything about the accident either.

'Mummy, how did this happen?' she asked. By this point, we knew what had happened, and we thought it was best to be completely honest with her. The garden heater she was sat next to exploded, and her dress caught fire. Tay was going to be scarred for life, and she

deserved to know the truth. 'Your dress caught on fire,' I gently explained to her. A sad and confused look washed across her face.

As the days went on, Tay's spark came back and she slowly became my bubbly little girl again as she did arts and crafts from her hospital bed.

'Look mum!' she smiled as she showed me a rainbow she'd drawn. 'That's beautiful, love,' I replied.



Nurses helped lift her spirits as she recovered in hospital

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